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ABSTRACT

Cultural diversity in the classroom is often seen as a block to learning and teaching, and the Urban Humanities Writing Project (UHWP--Greater Boston Area), a program which combines the teaching of writing with the principles and practices of multicultural education, was developed specifically to combat this negative view. The first component of the UHWP is a 13-week graduate level course for teachers and school administrators, since among the original assumptions were the following: (1) change can best be accomplished by those who work in schools; (2) teachers of writing must write themselves if they want to improve their students' writing; and (3) programs designed to improve the teaching of writing should involve teachers at all grade levels (K-13) and from all subject areas. Outstanding project teachers are then invited to participate in a 3-week summer institute (each week has a general focus), where each participant develops a multicultural writing curriculum unit appropriate to his or her grade level and subject area. During the final week, teachers construct their curriculum units, working individually and in small groups. By the end of the institute, teachers have produced a unit to be implemented during the upcoming school year. (Samples of student writings are included.) (NKA)

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Teacher Developed Writing Curriculum for Culturally Diverse Classrooms

Denise S. Burden

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Denise S. Burden

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)"

1.
Thank you.

The purpose of my talk this afternoon will be to present to you the results of a descriptive study , entitled the Urban Humanities Writing Project, a program which combines the teaching of writing with the principles and practices of multicultural education. I will describe the two teacher training graduate level courses, present examples of teacher developed curriculum materials, samples of student writing as a result of teachers using their unit in the classroom, project findings and I have prepared a short recommended reading list.

The Institute for Learning and Teaching at the University of Massachusetts at Boston has as one of its primary missions the development and implementation of educational programs in collaboration with public schools in the Greater Boston area. For the past six years the Institute has housed as one of its programs the only Massachusetts site of the National Writing Project, the Boston Writing Project.

Very early in our work with urban and suburban teachers we (Boston Writing Project staff) found that much of the most powerful and effective writing done by teachers in our regular writing summer institute was work based on the ethnic and cultural background of the writer. Teachers first identified and valued their own backgrounds by writing pieces about important events in their own cultural experiences such as pieces about grandparents, holidays, and ethnic traditions, etc. They shared this writing with peers in small groups to receive constructive feedback and comments on their work. Project teachers became very interested in their colleagues as members of ethnic groups and began to see similarities in the myriad of experiences that transcend cultural and ethnic boundaries. Furthermore, the importance of the subject matter made the revision process worth the effort; thus the quality of writing was very high. This experience was just what James Britton espouses. In his address to the National Council of Teachers of English several years ago, he summarized his philosophy by stating, "What matters about writing is that children should write about what matters to them to someone who matters to them." We found this approach to be easily transferable to adults as well.

These initial observations were developed in a major teacher training program entitled the Urban Humanities Writing Project, funded by the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1981. The purpose of this program was to investigate whether the same process I just described might work in the classroom to promote high quality student writing. Also, we observed that cultural diversity in the classroom was oftentimes seen as a block to learning and teaching. We wanted to reverse this thinking by encouraging teachers to examine how diversity might be used

as a motivating force for teaching reading and writing skills.

Our assumptions were that:
1. student writing can be improved by improving the teaching of writing.
2. Change can be best accomplished by those who work in schools.
3. Programs designed to improve the teaching of writing should involve teachers at all grade levels (K-13) and from all subject areas.
4. Teachers of writing must write themselves; and
5. All classrooms in the United States of America are culturally and/or ethnically diverse.

For us, cultural diversity or multiculturalism is inclusive, not exclusive. It is not a Black/White human relations issue, nor is it a minority issue. Rather, we see it as a philosophy that encompasses such diversity as: ethnicity, language, race, gender, age, religion, physical abilities, class, et al. In his book, Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies, James Banks asserts that "the major goals of multicultural education is to change the total educational environment so that it promotes a respect for a wide range of cultural groups and enables all cultural groups to experience equal educational opportunity."

The first component of the UHWP is a 13-week graduate level course for teachers and school administrators (K-12). Teachers apply to our program from the Boston and Cambridge Public Schools, surrounding suburban school systems and private (i.e. parochial) schools. Most of the time the class is comprised of Black, White, Hispanic and Asian educators from various ethnic groups. Oftentimes the initial feeling among some teachers from predominantly white schools is that "there is no diversity in my classroom." What they mean is that there is no significant minority population. I might also add that several "minority" teachers share this attitude as well by stating, "all my students are Black or Hispanic". Through various exercises and probing techniques such teachers uncover that there is ethnic diversity in their classrooms which is sometimes reflected in the school's neighborhood community.

During the 13-week course, project fellows receive training in the areas of: the writing process, techniques for improving their own writing, theoretical approaches to multicultural education and writing, research studies in writing and multicultural education, strategies and activities for infusing multicultural education into the teaching of writing, methods for responding to student writing, use of community cultural resources in the classroom, and multicultural reading and writing connections. In all of these activities teachers write; examine the writing processes used by themselves, their colleagues and their students; examine the issues of prejudice, discrimination and institutional racism in schools; participate in in-class demonstration lessons; maintain a journal which is responded

3.
to periodically by project staff; discuss the classroom implications of current research; and approach the teaching of writing and multicultural education in a cross-disciplinary context.

Some of the immediate benefits from the course are in the areas of student motivation, an increased sense of audience for student writing, self-discovery, revision and attitudinal changes. Perhaps the most significant finding reported from the 13-week course was an attitudinal change amongst teachers. A very important understanding for them was that one needn't have "minorities" or all students from the same race in order to have a multicultural classroom. Many teachers articulated an appreciation of the point of view that culture is one important element that shapes each student's individual contribution to society and that providing means for students to understand each other's cultural backgrounds played an important role in shaping values and behavior. It was also clear that the use of writing as a tool to express individual feelings and experiences was a powerful vehicle for students to explore cultural viewpoints. At the same time teachers continued to provide assistance to students in improving their writing. By this means teachers could use project activities to meet three sets of goals: their writing curriculum; the promotion of multicultural principles; and an experience based appreciation of cultural diversity.

Upon successful completion of the 13-week course, outstanding project teachers are invited to participate in a 3-week summer institute. In this institute each teacher develops a multicultural writing curriculum unit appropriate to his/her grade level and subject area. In addition to the assumptions for the 13-week course, for this course we believe that:
1. The intuitions and experiences of teachers can be a productive guide for teacher developed curriculum and that these practitioners can conduct useful studies of their own work in the classroom.
2. Teachers, especially those in urban areas, are looking for solutions to urgent, every day problems - particularly in the area of improving student writing skills. In short, teachers need more than quick fixes.
3. Some of the best developers of curriculum are teachers themselves; and
4. Each curriculum unit developed during the summer institute must be an integral part of the regular school curriculum and not be approached as an add-on.

Each week of the curriculum development summer institute has a general focus. Week one is devoted to exploring the theory, principles and practices of curriculum development. Here we rely heavily on the work of Bob Suzuki - his monograph entitled "Curriculum Transformation for Multicultural Education", James Moffetts' book - Teaching the Universe of Discourse, George Hillocks' work - The English Curriculum Under Fire:

4.

What Are The Real Basics? (the course text), James Banks' book - Teaching Strategies for Ethnic Studies, Anne Gere and Dixie Goswami's respective work on teachers as researchers. Close attention is given to James Moffetts' advice regarding sequencing activities and assignments for writing. Project teachers tend to unanimously agree with him in terms of arranging assignments to first direct students to look inward, then move them toward producing more objective pieces of writing in a multicultural context. This approach to curriculum development provides a necessary connection between using a process approach to the teaching of writing and multicultural education. During this first week, teachers also examine their own school system curriculum goals and objectives at their particular grade level and subject area and apply the principles of multicultural education and writing to curriculum development. Lastly, teachers decide on the topic of their curriculum and produce a first draft transactional piece of writing about the essence of curriculum development.

During the second week, project teachers gather resources for their unit at the various cultural institutions in the Greater Boston area. Institutions like the Cambridge Haitian American Association, Bilingual Resource Center, Boston African American National Historic Site, Boston Indian Council, and the Cambridge Organization for Portuguese Americans, to name just a few, have provided invaluable resources to project teachers. Teachers also continue to work on their own writing and continue to read related literature. The group convenes on the Friday of that week to share cultural resources gathered, meet in writing groups to receive feedback on ways to improve their second draft and to outline their curriculum unit.

After these two weeks of preparation, project teachers construct their curriculum units during the final week of the institute. Teachers work individually and in small groups on this task. They specifically design their units to be manageable and doable in the classroom. By the end of the institute, teachers have produced a first draft of their unit to be implemented the upcoming school year; a class anthology which includes the transactional pieces on curriculum development, resource lists of cultural institutions, and reviews of relevant books and articles. The first draft of the curriculum units are submitted to the project director and co-director for feedback and comments.

Perhaps the most significant finding reported from the 3-week course was the fact that all project fellows stated that they felt more comfortable developing their own curriculum as a result of the summer institute. 90% of the fellows at the end of the course felt more comfortable about conducting classroom based research on the unit they developed.

Writing project staff convene periodic follow-up meetings throughout the year thus providing a forum for project teachers to share their reactions and get feedback in a supportive environment during the curriculum unit implementation phase. Teachers revise their units, include samples of student writing for specific activities, and ultimately share their work with colleagues in the Greater Boston area at a mini-conference at the end of the school year, hosted by the Boston Writing Project. I have selected samples of student writing from the two units we looked at a few minutes ago and one groups poem developed by two 4th grade classes at a school in Boston. One class was a monolingual English speaking group and the other a Spanish bilingual group

WARREN'S STUDENT - appendix A, B, C

MARY'S HAITIAN STUDENT - appendix D

JEAN'S GROUP POEM - appendix E

The most common impact reported by teachers as a direct result of their learning and teaching experiences in the Urban Humanities Writing Project was that they were getting more actual writing from their students. This they attirbuted to the personal involvement their students had in expressing those things which were important to them and which captured their own individuality. As several teachers explained during one of our

follow-up meetings, the students are experts on themselves so they had plenty of material to write about and they were always right. Students also began seeing and appreciating differences n new ways and finding ways within their writing to really try to get a message across about themselves, as witnessed in the piece about prejudice.

Furthermore, the increased amount of writing provided teachers with multiple opportunities to teach writing mechnics like grammar and punctuation without having to use routine drills all of the time. One teacher reported that her curriculum unit had provided the first time that students had ever really gone beyond what they were told to do and exercised originality in the completion of the activity.

Teachers attribute the use of journals, providing multicultural student reading material, their improved techniques for responding to student writing, the use of peer editing and the overall change in their approach to teaching writing as the crux of the success of their curriculum unit. We have come to realize the critical importance of teachers training teachers in creating school system change. Several UHWP fellows now serve as resource people in the area of multicultural education and writing in their school systems and as consultants outside of their system. They are also eager to conduct classroom-based research concerning their developed curriculum.

Due to the success and continued need for a program of this type, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Massachusetts State Board of Regents have since funded this project. In conclusion, to borrow from our NCTE 75th birthday conference theme, we in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts are beginning to see our classrooms as a meeting place of many cultures and peoples. The Urban Huamanities Writing Project is one way we are adapting to diversity, thus attempting to reach the minds of all students who come to us.

Thank you.

Appendix A

STORY OF PREJEDIS

It all happened Agust 12, 1953 me and a friend were on our way for some ice cream, Susan had to go to the bathroom so she stopped next door to the ice cream palor. This man gave her a strange look. He said no blacks are allowed her, can't you read the sign was outside of the store. I was white so I decided to try and get in the bathroom, I held a conversation with him while I gave Susan the go ahead, he caught slapped her in the face called the dogs on her. I was really upset, I was saying to myself why can't we all get along. Then I though of a plan. The name of the plan was called unity and peace. I began to work on the plan onthe plan it several years before my first book was on the way. I was arrested several times in a two year period.

UNITY AND PEACE

It all happened Agust 12, 1963 in a small town of Georgia. Me and a friend named Susan Butler were on our way for some ice cream, she had to the bathroom before we got halfway there. So I saw one next door we went in, she was on her way to the bathroom, A white man of about thirty stopped and "said' hey kid can't you see no black people are allowed in here especially ones as black as you. I was very mad and upset and busted out and said why can't we get along, what the hell is wrong with black people they are just as smart as we are and smarter. The man said shut up and get the hell out of my store. So I began to think of a plan and I came up with one I named it peace and unity. I wrote a book to explain enxactely what this title was for. Unity means together peace mean no fighting loving each other no matter what color or race or place you are from. It took me two years to get my first novel printed out of the two years I was arrested several times for peace movements against racism. Then finally all the fighting was over I had proved my point. I was now a famous author and a member NAACP.

UNITY AND PEACE

It happened in 1963 in a small town in Georgia. Me and a friend named Susan Butler were on our way for some ice cream. She had to go to the bathroom before we got halfway there. So I saw one next store. We went in, she was on her way to the bathroom. A white man of about thirty stopped and said "hey kid can't you see no black people are allowed in here especially ones as black as you. I was very mad and upset and busted out and said "why can't we get along, what the hell is wrong with black people. They are just as smart as you are and smarter. The man said shut up and get the hell out of my store. So I began to think of a plan and I came up with one. I named it peace and unity. I wrote a book to explain exactely what this title was for. Unity means together peace mean no fighting loving each other no matter what color or race or place you are from. It took me two years to get my first novel printed. Out of the two years I was arrested several times for being in civil rights movements against racism. Then finally all the fighting was over. I had proved my point. People read my book and believed in peace and unity. I was now a famous author and a member of NAACP.

HAITI

Life in Haiti is very hard sometimes. Sometimes people are stuck with a day that's so gray and lonely. And you got to hang there until tomorrow to see what God is going to give you for life. You are walking alone just like a leaf that became so thin, with no water to give it life.

School in Haiti is very hard to understand. Teachers are beating you. They give hard work. But it's for your own good and life.

Police are fighting with each other. They are shooting people. Sometimes it's like there's no hope for other people.

The president is in politics with other presidents in other countries. They put you in prison for nothing. People are killing other human beings. The president is giving the police bad rules. Peoole destroy people to get some food.

Sometimes the president helps the poor, but when the wind destroyed their houses, the presiden let some of the poor people starve.

Life in Haiti is not always bad. Life in Haiti is good, too. People have fun and Haiti is very warm and beautiful. There are beautiful beaches and good food to eat, too. People live in houses. They have many games you can play, too like marbles, soccer, tennis, and volleyball. Carnival is very beautiful and exciting.

In Haiti most of the people are joyful and happy. My country is exciting, neat, and fun. I am telling you, life in Haiti can be fun and good.

Appendix E

HURLEY POETRY IN THE P.M.

Every Thursday afternoon, Mrs. Gibran's fourth graders and Mrs. Soto's fourth and fifth Bilingual students get together in Room 207 to read and write poems.

WE ARE FAMILY has been their main theme. They've enjoyed family poems by Sam Cornish, Nikki Giovanni, and Archibald Macleish. They've also learned Spanish poems.

Here is a sample of their own group efforts and some individual creations. This is just the beginning. More are on the way!

MOTHERS

Black hair Blonde hair
Brown hair Red hair
Blue eyes Glad eyes
Brown eyes Sad eyes
Brown skin Chocolate
Peach skin Strawberry
White skin Vanilla
Angel faces Cutie pies
Nice smiles Pearl teeth
Red nails Smooth hands
Blue jeans Jordache
Sneakers High heels
Bracelets Gold rings
Very kind Very poor
Pretty Understanding
Cook cook Clean clothes
Washes dishes Makes cakes
Works hard Goes out
We all LOVE our mothers.

by Rooms
207 + 208, J.J.Hurley School

MAMA - A BILINGUAL POEM

Mama is
Cute, linda,
Nice, buena,
Understanding, entiendida
Pretty, preciosa,

Mama es
Bonita, beautiful,
Grande, tall,
Inteligente, intelligent,
Contenta, Happy.

by Rooms 207 + 208
J.J.Hurley School

May 2, 1986

PUERTO RICO

I like Puerto Rico, I don't know why. I like the beaches and the views are very beautiful too. Puerto Rico is the smallest island of the Great Antillas. The flag of Puerto Rico have 3 colors: blue, red, and white. I count 5 lines, 3 are red and 2 are white. It has a blue triangle with a white star in the middle. There is a song in honor of the flag, the song is called "Que Bonita Bandera" ("What a beautiful flag"). The capital of Puerto Rico is San Juan. Long ago in San Juan, the Spanish people built a castle named "El Morro" and it's very hard. The indians of Puerto Rico were called Laines. The indians called "Borenquen" Puerto Rico.

Boston Writing Project

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